



FACT SHEET #2:

What Causes Particulate Air Pollution?

Human activities generate most of the airborne particles that we breathe. Some of the activities that create particulate air pollution are:

- Construction and earthmoving operations
- Dust kicked-up by vehicles traveling on paved roads
- Vehicles driving on dirt roads, unpaved shoulders, and vacant lots
- Tilling and other farming activities

The highest levels of particulate air pollution in Arizona are found near highly-populated areas in the desert.

Some particulate air pollution is caused by natural sources. For example, dry conditions are conducive to higher airborne particulates, especially when accompanied by high winds (i.e., 25 mph gusts). But excessive rainfall can also lead to higher particulate pollution, because mud tracked onto the pavement dries and is ejected into the air by moving vehicles.

The undisturbed natural desert produces some particulate air pollution, but the amounts are not high enough to cause health problems. In Arizona, particulate air pollution does not occur during a particular month or season; high levels can occur at any time of the year in the human-disturbed desert.